

## EDUCATION AND RACIAL TRAITS

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While I am on the program to speak of education from the standpoint of racial traits, for the sake of clearness I will say at the beginning that I do not regard racial characteristics in the true sense as sufficiently fundamental to influence educational policy. The real problem is to adjust educational policy not to mental traits in the biological sense but to the grades of culture existing among the different races.

In order to make plain the distinction between racial traits and cultural conditions implied in all that I shall say, let me refer first of all to the human faculties regardless of race. Passing over the sense perceptions, memory, inhibition, etc., we find that there is just one mental faculty not shared with man by the lower animals- the power of abstraction. This power is best illustrated by language and numbers. The word "three," for instance, does not mean three persons, nor three apples, but here anything. It is a general or abstract term. "Seven" is not only 2 and 5, but 3 and 4. It may be true, though we do not readily believe it, that a Chicago boy recently appeared at home in a state of depression and complained that his teacher had been saying for a week that 3 and 4 made 7, and now she was saying that 5 and 2 made 7. At any rate he was not a black boy. When a child is blind, deaf and dumb, it is very difficult to present abstract conceptions, not because the brain is not capable of receiving them, but because the absence of all but one sense makes the presentation difficult. When Laura Bridgman was asked: "If you can buy a barrel of cider for \$1, how many barrels can you buy for \$5?" She replied: "I would not buy so much; it is sour." Similarly the teacher of this girl had trouble in getting her to understand what the books for the blind meant. They pasted the raised letters h-a-t on a hat, and c-h-a-i-r on a chair, and she repeated this and learned to arrange the letters correctly, but for a long time it was only a sort of game. That was all the teachers could do; for the rest they could only wait for the power of abstraction to show itself, and finally it struck her that the word meant the thing and she learned reading with great enthusiasm and rapidity.

Now this power none of the animals possesses. None of them can count and none of them can talk. You may know that a German mathematician thought he had a horse, Clever Hans, who could add figures. A number of scientists were called in and the horse counted for them. He would count for anybody. But finally this occurred to the scientists: the two numbers to be added were given by two men, one whispered 2 in one ear of the horse and the other 3 in the other ear, and neither of the men knew what the other had whispered. Ordinarily the horse would have moved his hoof 5 times, but in this case he did not know when to stop. Formerly he had seen by

the facial expression of the men, and a slight inclination of the head when they expected him to stop. Now they did not know when to expect him to stop, and he could not stop.

We often hear a man say he has a dog that can think. But he is using “think” in a very loose way. A man in the field may send his dog to the house for his coat. The man is not complete without the coat and the dog will fetch it. Or, a man may take his dog for a boat ride and finding that he has forgotten the sponge with which he bails the boat may send the dog to the house for the sponge; that is, if the dog has seen the sponge used in that way. But if the dog cannot find the sponge, will he bring a coffee sack or a bed blanket, or a brace-and-bit and pot of tar, with the tacit suggestion that the master shall bore a hole and drain the water out and plug the hole? A very clever boy would make the substitution, but a dog never. There is a resemblance between the dipper and the sponge which a dog never sees. This resemblance is rather awkwardly called by the psychologists “association by similarity.” The dog can only make association by contiguity, as in the case of the coat and the man.

There is a resemblance between a horse, a stream of water, a jet of steam, and electric wire; they all furnish power – horsepower, waterpower, etc. The concept “power” is in the region of abstraction and no animal enters this region. But all men of all races can count and speak, and apprehend such terms as power, light, truth. If they cannot, they are what we call imbecile, and the imbecile may just as likely be white as black as yellow.

Language and number are types of the most difficult things the mind does. Nobody who attended the meeting last night could seriously claim that the black man has feeble powers of speech. The stories that black men cannot count simply represent errors of observation on the part of the white observer. The savage does not go into counting heavily because he is not in business, and it is contrary to good sense to expect the development of an elaborate system of notation where there is not much to be noted. The savage always counts as much as is necessary to carry on his affairs. Some of the absurd reports about the African’s lack of number sense arose from the fact that it was life-policy of black to conceal the truth from the white. Livingstone relates that a Zulu chief counted out 1000 head of cattle as a start in life for his son at the very time travelers were reporting that this people could not count beyond three.

We may assume then that all races have the same general type of mind, capable of doing the same general classes of work, and adaptable to the same general methods of education. The mind that can do “mental arithmetic” can do anything.

The second general question arising in this connection is whether the brain of the white race is not a superior organ to that of the black, capable of doing, if not a different kind, yet a better class of work. Anthropologists do not feel that they know very much about the question of

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brain weight and mental endowment by races. They know that individual differences in brain weight are very great in the same race, - that, for instance, the difference in weight between the lowest and highest in a series of 500 normal white brains will be as much as 600 grams or 33 per cent, and may be as much as 50 per cent. This is an enormous difference, while the average difference in the brain weight of races is very slight. This means that the individual is the real variant, not the race. Moreover, an exaggerated importance was formerly attached to brain weight. It is not a sure index of intelligence. Doubtless a generous brain is a favorable sign, but after all, brains are somewhat like timepieces- the lady's watch may keep better time than the grandfather's clock. It is also an open question whether a dogged disposition is not a more valuable asset than a great brain. But the most important fact in this connection is that all races possess individuals ranging in intelligence from idiocy to rare endowment, and we do not know the proportion in which endowment is distributed among the races. At any rate, it is not a flat question of superiority and inferiority. There are brilliant and stupid individuals in all races.

But it is not true that a race educated for centuries and practicing professions calling out mental power will transmit by heredity to its children the results of its mental practice? If a man or woman uses up the mind in a particular way, say in mathematical practices, or in language studies, will not the child of such a person be more gifted along that line on that account? We do not now believe this. No man's intelligence was ever improved because his father went to college. I mean, his natural endowment is not improved. His intelligence, in the sense of his knowledge, will indeed be improved through having a cultured rather than an ignorant father, but solely in the sense that his father will communicate knowledge to him. The boy will not have a greater mental aptitude born in him on account of the life habits of his father.

But will a boy never be naturally more gifted than his father? Yes, he may inherit superior gifts from his mother, or he may inherit ancestors which did not come to the surface in his father; or, he may, so to speak, just turn out better, as one or two puppies in a litter have better markings than the other seven. We all know that the loss of teeth and fingers and arms and legs is not inherited. These things happen after birth. But if a man is born with six toes, his children may also have six. There is no such thing as parental influence in the popular use of that term. There are no birth-marks caused by the mother's fright at certain objects. A story is always invented to fit the birth-mark. There is in Berlin a man who is the living image of a hog. I venture the guess there is a story that his mother was run over by a hog while pregnant. The only connection between the mother and the child in the period of pregnancy is a stream of blood. The child may be ill-nourished, or may be poisoned, if the mother's blood is poisoned, say by alcohol, but no impressions are conveyed to the child's nervous system.

This view that the child tends to be as his parents were at their birth, not as they became later in life – that he does not inherit their practice- has seemed to many a very discouraging conclusion. “What,” said Herbert Spencer, “is the use of education, if it is not inherited?” But it is really far from a discouraging view. It means, in the first place, that the child of a criminal will not necessarily become a criminal, for the larger part of our criminals are made by our social arrangements. A Chicago slum boy, having the instincts of a boy, may want to keep some chickens. He needs corn for them but is not on a farm and has no money, so he “swipes” some corn from a freight car. Formerly, at least, he would have been sent to jail with old criminals and would surely have become a criminal, and, according to the old theory, his children would have been born criminals. In the second place, the new view means, very fortunately, that the mistakes, sickness, and false views of parents are not inherited by the children and that our old system of education, with its diagramming of sentences and other absurdities, does not weaken the mind of the second generation. Just think how weak our minds would be if we inherited all our fathers were taught!

With reference to the social classes, in, say, white society, the view that acquired characters are not inherited means that the poor boy whose parents are ignorant is not necessarily outclassed by the rich boy whose parents are educated. If the state of education on the one hand, or ignorance of ancestors on the other, were inherited, would it not be impossible to account for such a man as Lincoln, who had little to inherit but ignorance?

Privileged classes have existed in white society for thousands of years and if superior opportunity implied superior brain structure in children, the common man, of common antecedents, would be so far outclassed that he could not think on the same plane as the descendants of the privileged classes, and popular government would never have been thought of.

With reference to race superiority and inferiority the new view of heredity means that the whole record of civilization has left no mark on the brain structure of the white child. It is possible that a superior brain may have produced a superior civilization; it is not possible that a superior civilization has produced a superior brain, unless we assume a selective birth and death rate. That one race gets the start of another is no indication of superiority, but due to local circumstances. The whites had the start of the Japanese, but no one can seriously pretend that the Japanese are not able to compete with us.

At this point we are able to answer Herbert Spencer’s question. Education is of use even if not inherited biologically, because it is inherited socially. The child’s mind may be regarded as a blank. Aristotle, indeed, called it a clean slate- a *tabularasa*. If the parents are cultured this culture will be transferred to the child; if the state of knowledge in the race or group is advanced

this advance will be handed over to the child during the child's lifetime. Such a child has a better *chance* to become intelligent. The best illustration I can give of the importance of the state of knowledge in this connection is the difference in the text-books of science now and a generation ago. It is sage to say that no single scientific treatise issued forty years ago is now of any account. Even theology and history have changed greatly. Psychology is almost entirely new. What book from your grandfather's library would you preserve from other than sentimental or historical reasons? A hundred years hence all will be changed again. Every child has to learn the whole of life and civilization. All of it has to be handed over to him. If the state of knowledge and education is improved in each generation, you have wiser and wiser children and men, regardless of whether their brain structure is changed at all. This is *social* heredity.

I may refer to a still further consequence of this view. It becomes senseless to speak of a savage and a civilized mind in another than a social sense. There is no such thing as a savage, except in the sense that there are races whose habits and mental attitudes and state of knowledge differ from those of the whites. Indeed, we are all savages in the sense that we prefer fishing and baseball to hard labor. Again, there is the culture-epoch theory or the view that the child recapitulates civilization in his brain growth, passing through periods corresponding to savagery and barbarism before entering the civilized period. In point of fact, he recapitulates civilization only in the sense that he moves his habits from the more instinctive and impulsive world of play over into the world of work. He differs from the savage in being taught a different system.

Finally, from this standpoint, the popular statement that the Negro will have to be educated for thousands of years before he is as capable as the white becomes absurd. The white child has not inherited civilization in his brain but has inherited a chance. He begins a blank, and imitates the world as it presents itself to him. If the Negro has a mind capable of doing the same thing he will do it in a life-time, provided he has the same chance.

I regard it, then, as a very welcome and fortunate conclusion that the fate of the child is not determined, generally speaking, before birth but after, and that, theoretically, at least, the highest mental and cultural life is in the reach of any race within a single generation. I say, theoretically, because the practical hindrances to this may be something monstrous. It is as bad, for instance, to have a criminal environment as to have a criminal heredity. I can take you to a "joint" in Chicago where the boy's ideal is to crack a safe and make a clever "get-away." In that way he will get a pat on the back from the older members of a criminal gang. It used to be thought that it would be time enough to get a child away from criminal surroundings at five or ten years of age. But now criminologists realize that all is over by that time. You must get him as soon as his eyes are open. Old Pliny has a story that the baby bear is not born shaped up properly but is a formless mass which the mother bear licks into shape. This is bad natural history but

good psychology. The child tends to take the imprint of the social world into which he is born. He will imitate whatever prevails in his society. But if the conditions of mental life are poor, if there is not much culture to imitate, the individual cannot rise much above the level. What chance to read and write and cipher would a boy have in a community where nobody did any of these things? And what chance at large intellectual life would he have without these simple tools? In other words, you cannot have a high state of mind in a low state of society.

There are, then, three factors connected with mind and education: (1) The absolute quality of mind of the individual; (2) The state of knowledge in his group (we will call this the copies which he may imitate); and (3) The success or unsuccess of the individual in coming into connection with this state of knowledge, these copies.

Let me here indicate briefly what I mean by the third point- the exclusion of an individual or race from the materials which go to make up culture. I do not attach great importance to classificatory terms, but I will use the term "isolation" to describe any shutting of the individuals from the copies. Geographical remoteness, poverty, ignorance of reading, race prejudice are forms of isolation. To show how serious this isolation may be, let me again refer to language. Speech is one thing from which you cannot usually be excluded. But you can imagine how isolated Laura Bridgman would have been if Dr. Howe had not developed a means of communicating with her through the sense of touch. She would have been virtually though not technically an idiot. The following occurred recently in the Chicago public schools. A boy could not keep up with his class. He could not learn to read. He remained in the first grade while the others passed up. He finally found himself, a big boy, surrounded by infants. He became ashamed, and "beat it," as he would have said. Being now adrift he naturally got into some trouble and was brought into the juvenile court. There he was examined and it was found that he had not been able to learn to read because he could not see the print. This one point of isolation – isolation from the printed page- had stopped the process of mental and social development. Provided with proper glasses this boy connected up all right and "struck the trail." I must not enumerate cases, but it is apparent that the Negro, the serf, the poor white, the alum-dweller, for instance, may be as really isolated by geographical and social conditions as this boy was by defective vision.

It may naturally occur to some of you that race prejudice is the most serious and oppressive form of isolation and cause of mental backwardness in the case of the Negro, and I am certainly not inclined to make light of prejudice. At the same time I do not regard it as a profoundly serious matter. It is something you can get by; it may even be a stimulation. Compared with slavery or serfdom, it is trivial. I am now making some studies among the Slavic peasants of Europe, and the peasant was and is mentally as backward as the Negro is or as he

was in slavery. I have found even more backward cases. But my main reason for speaking lightly of prejudice is that it does not successfully isolate. One of the gentlemen from Jamaica who excited your interest here yesterday by his mental poise and the nimbleness of his wits confessed that he had studied in some of the most important centers of learning in the world.

But I mean something more than this. We do not need all the copies in the world for our complete cultural and mental development. We need only a complete series of good copies, and these can be assembled in a small space. Athens had, I believe, only 40,000 citizens, but developed some wonderful cultural and mental forms which we continue to imitate long after they are out of date. Tuskegee represents a cultural group complete in itself, furnishing all that the boy could get in a white center of the same kind. I suppose this idea of Negro cultural centers will be developed further. I am sure you will not consider me an advocate of race prejudice when I point out that Tuskegee is a product of this prejudice and I regard Tuskegee as the most considerable educational invention of modern times.

We are not here to praise Tuskegee and Mr. Washington. I should not have the hardihood to do so. For a southern white man to congratulate a colored man on his success might remind you of Lord Chesterfield's congratulations to Samuel Johnson on the completion of the latter's great dictionary. Chesterfield had given Johnson no help in making the dictionary, and Johnson said Chesterfield's conduct reminded him of a spectator who watched a man struggling in the water and overwhelmed him with congratulations when he had saved himself. But as we are here to get different angles of vision it may interest you to know why this institution interests me peculiarly.

In the first place, Mr. Washington has gone back to or taken up a principle which the whites had at one time dropped from view namely, that the mind is largely the product of the hand and the eye; that many of our concepts are of manual origin. Tuskegee has abandoned some of the white educational fetishes, like Latin and Greek, and has at the same time developed a system of education closer to the life of the masses of black people than the white system is to the masses of the whites. The white system is still, in the main, designed for the privileged classes.

A backward race always tends to imitate the weaker side of what we are pleased to call civilization- its luxury, leisure, vices, and classical learning- and in Tuskegee we have an opportunity to see the Negro developed under a leadership which selects and presents sane copies. When the habits of a race are suddenly changed, when a backward race in particular is thrown on its own resources, there is some disorganization of habit. We saw this in the freedmen after emancipation. We have a striking example in Liberia and Hayti. The old habits are not

adequate to meet the crisis, the new ones are not formed. We see here a backward race being put in possession of a technique adequate to meet the crisis.

Under adequate leadership and organization at Tuskegee, we see the pace of a race changed. We may use the term “pace” to express the rate of energy at which a people lives. Professor William James claims that we all have untapped reservoirs of energy and that we habitually live at a rate below our full powers. The owner of the celebrated pacing horse, Dan Patch, said that animal had always shown a tendency to go as fast as the pace set. When paced by a running horse he went a mile in 1.56. A good illustration of the pacing principle is college athletics. There is always a tendency to approach the record. American business methods represent a very fast pace in one field. The Negro in slavery never worked at a high rate of energy. When brought into competition with the Italian cotton grower he was for a time outclassed. We are here seeing this condition changed. We have here indeed the unique spectacle of a backward race setting the pace in some fields: for instance, in growing sweet potatoes.

The complete cultural group at Tuskegee implies the gradual differentiation of occupations and classes, and progress is very closely bound up with a middle class and with differentiated callings.